

PROCEEDINGS
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THE GENERIC NAME OF THE MUSKRAT.

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For over sixty years the propriety of *Fiber* as the generic name of the muskrat has not been questioned. A careful review of the history and synonymy of the genus brings to light a surprising state of uncertainty as to the validity of this name.

Linnaeus, after having previously confounded the American muskrat with his *Castor moschatus* (= *Desmana moschata*) of Asia, in 1766 recognized it as a distinct species, naming it *Castor zibethicus*. Gmelin, 1788, transferred it to the Linnaean genus *Mus*, placing it in a starred section (*cauda apice compressa*) with the *Mus coypus* of Molina. Kerr, 1792, gave this section a subgeneric name, *Myocastor*.^{*} Link, 1795, erected the genus *Ondatra*,[†] with the same two component species, *Ondatra coypus* and *O. zibethicus*. Lacepède, 1799, listed a genus *Ondatra*,[‡] with *Ondatra zibethicus* as the typical specific example. Presumably, he, like the others, considered the coypu congeneric with the muskrat. Cuvier, 1800, named a subgenus *Fiber*,[§] based on the ondatra of his "Tableau,"⁵ 1798, and Illiger, 1811, formally adopted the combination *Fiber zibethicus*.^{||} Various other generic names were later proposed for the animal, but these have no bearing on the case in question. Lesson seems to have been the last author to consider *Ondatra* seriously, after which the name dropped into the synonymy of *Fiber*.

^{*} Anim. Kingd., p. 225, 1792.

[†] Beytr. Nat., I, pt. II, p. 76, 1795.

[‡] Tabl. Mamm., p. 9, 1799.

[§] Leçons, d' Anat. Comp., I, tabl. I, 1800.

^{||} Prodr. Syst. Mamm., p. 88, 1811.

According to Canon XXVI of the A. O. U. code (XXII of the revised edition) inasmuch as no genotypes were designated for *Myocastor* Kerr and *Ondatra* Link the latter at once became a synonym of *Myocastor*. Lacepède's *Ondatra* was of course preoccupied by *Ondatra* Link. According to the International code, however, it is necessary to fix the types of these various genera to settle their respective standings. The types of *Castor* and *Mus* are fixed by tautonymy, and Allen has, by the process of elimination, fixed the type of *Myocastor*.^{*} It remains then only to fix the type of *Ondatra* Link. Every logical argument is in favor of naming *Ondatra zibethicus* as the type of this genus, and thus reinstate the name *Ondatra* for the muskrat. The name is distinctively applicable to the animal, and with a slightly broader interpretation of tautonymy than seems at present allowed by the code, *zibethicus* would automatically be the type, "*Ondatra. Buffon hist. nat. X. p. I. t. I*" appearing in the synonymy of Gmelin's *Mus zibethicus*. It seems unsafe to choose it as such at this late day, however, with the uncertainty as to whether Palmer (*Index Generum Mammalium*, Appendix, p. 951) has not already unintentionally fixed *Mus coypus* in that position. Palmer, under *Ondatra* Lacepède, 1799, states: "Not *Ondatra* Link, 1795, a synonym of *Myocastor* Kerr, 1792 (type *Mus coypus* Molina), which is a genus of Octodontidae." That a difference of opinion regarding this question might always obtain was at once apparent when it was submitted to several nomenclatorial experts. In order to settle it definitely I, therefore, choose *Ondatra coypus* as the type of *Ondatra* Link, 1795.

This selection will, at any rate, bring about the same results by both codes; satisfy the few American mammalogists who are, unfortunately, still loyal to the A. O. U. code; and perpetuate the name *Fiber*, under which the great mass of literature relating to the animal has been published.

^{*} *Myocastor coypus*; Allen, Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist., VII, p. 183, 1895.